

The President's Daily Brief

20 November 1969

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

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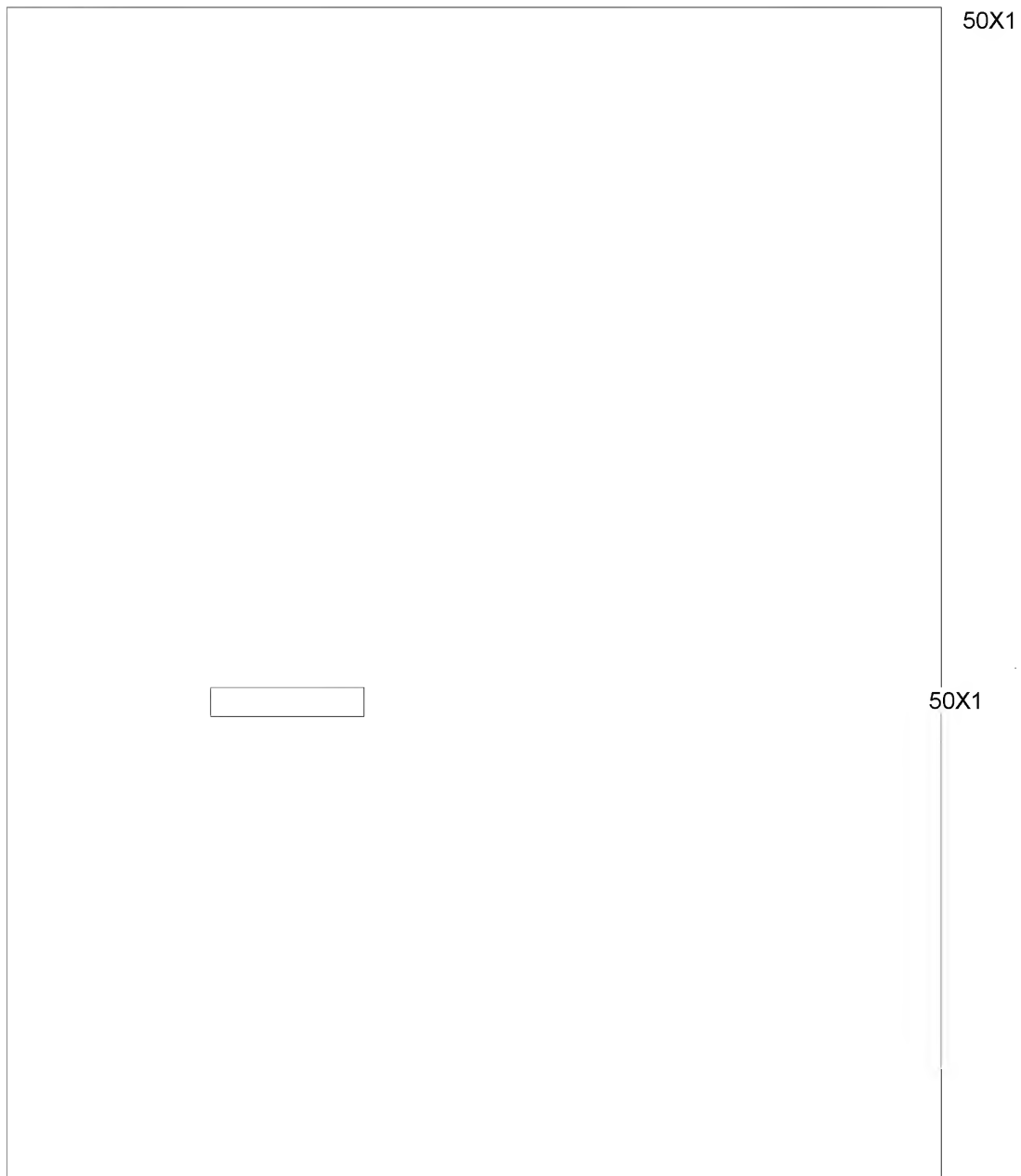
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In South Vietnam the Communists seem to be getting ready for heavier ground attacks against the Bu Prang and Duc Lap outposts, perhaps in conjunction with a greater enemy effort throughout the central highlands. (Page 3)

Communist forces in Laos also are more active, both in the Plaine des Jarres area and in the southern panhandle. (Page 4)

Ethiopian security authorities have quashed an assassination plot against the Emperor. (Page 5)

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CHINA

Recent satellite photography shows that personnel trenches are being dug throughout the country. Since September these trenches have been observed near worker housing areas, government centers, industrial areas, general storage facilities, and military installations. The largest concentrations are along the border in northern and eastern China, but the program appears to be nationwide, and trenches have been observed even in such remote places as Tibet.

This program is apparently another element of Peking's recent "war preparations" campaign ostensibly directed against the Soviet Union--a campaign that, as recent radiobroadcasts have hinted, is encountering apathy at local levels. The size and location of most of the trenches suggest that they are not military defensive preparations against a land invasion. At best they could provide modest protection in the event of an air raid. The trench-digging program--a crash project involving large numbers of laborers--has the effect of dramatizing Peking's exhortations to the populace on the need to prepare for "imminent" Soviet attack.

It also gives additional impetus to the regime's concurrent attempt to move vast numbers of people from the cities to outlying villages. This effort is motivated by economic and political considerations, but Peking has attempted to facilitate the mass movement by connecting it with the "war preparations" campaign.

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At the same time the regime appears to be engaged in a limited readjustment of its military posture. As reported in The President's Daily Brief of 18 November, increased numbers of tanks have been observed in the northern border areas; these tanks are apparently being dispersed and dug into defensive positions. Some aircraft stationed at northern airfields have also been dispersed. Since 3 October, additional fighter aircraft have been re-deployed to air fields in southern China in the general vicinity of the Vietnam border. Finally, elements of three armies are apparently being shifted to new locations in southeastern China.

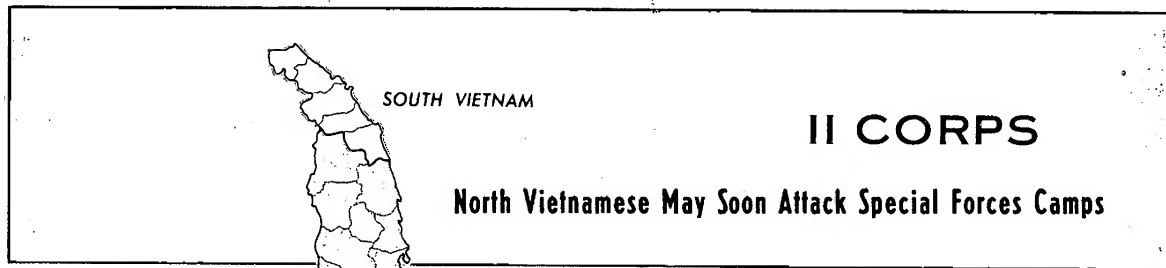
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The movement of tanks and aircraft in the north is part of a modest reinforcement effort that has been going on near the Soviet border for some time; dispersal of these forces seems a prudent precaution and probably does not reflect excessive fear of an imminent Soviet attack.

We are hard put to explain satisfactorily the military movements in southern China, however. Deployment of additional fighter aircraft to southern fields may represent contingency defensive measures on the part of Peking. At this time there is nothing to relate the movement of ground forces in the south to this redeployment of aircraft. The shift may be part of a routine rotation of forces similar to one that took place in this area a year ago. It may also be motivated by domestic political considerations of one sort or another. We cannot rule out the possibility that some of these troops may eventually be transferred to other areas of the country, however.

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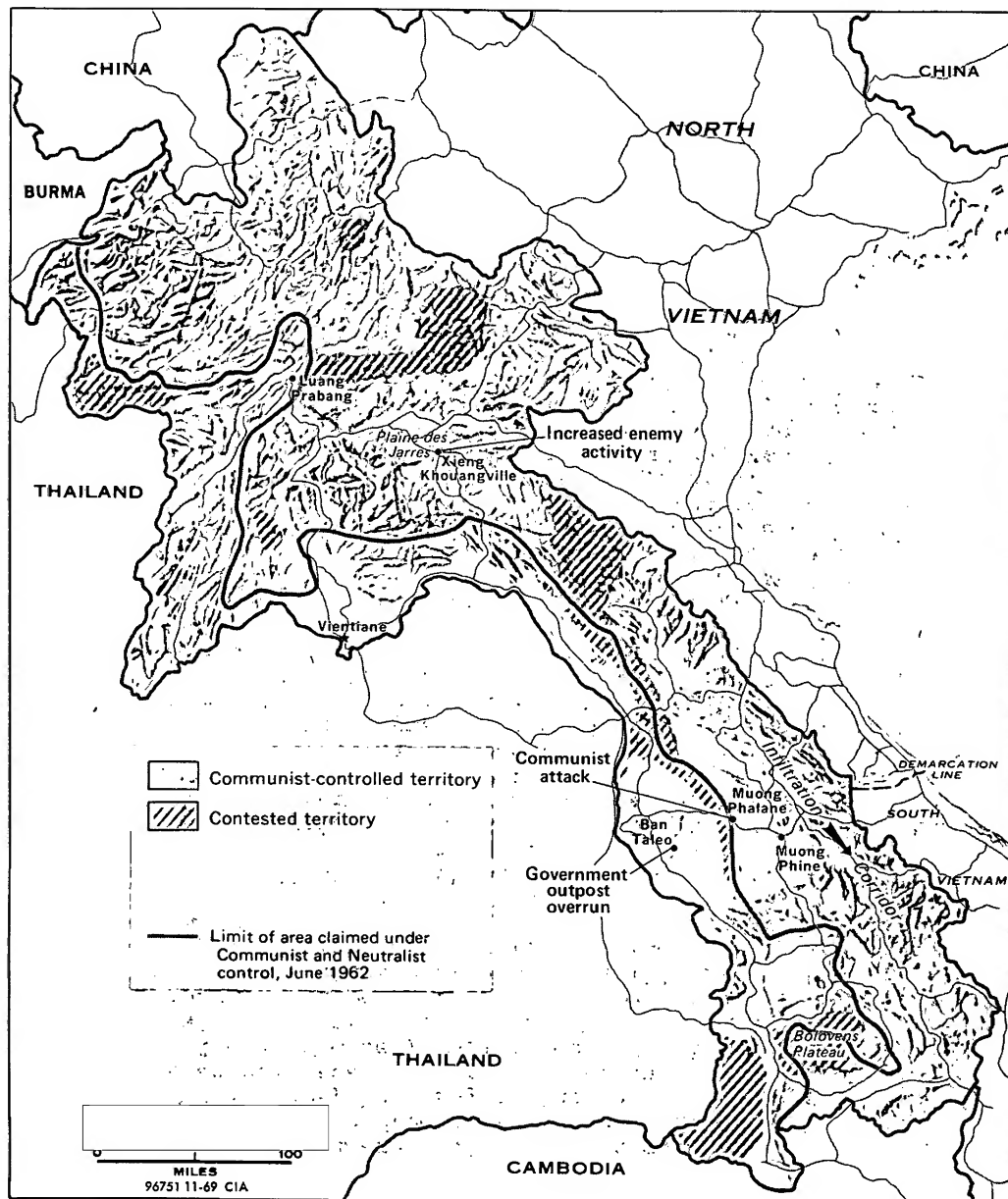
VIETNAM

There are indications in communications intelligence and from other sources that the North Vietnamese may be readying themselves for sizable ground attacks against the Bu Prang and Duc Lap outposts. On 18 November, an intercept disclosed that the headquarters of two North Vietnamese infantry regiments had moved up close to the camps. The timing of any infantry attacks is still not clear. One prisoner claims they will not come until early December.

If the attacks come off, they may be part of a coordinated effort throughout the central highlands. A Communist sapper battalion has shifted toward the Dak To outpost and a recent message told other enemy units to "strike all the bridge positions," probably along Route 14 between Pleiku and Kontum towns. Other intercepts have asserted that the "de-Americanization scheme" already has been seriously frustrated by Communist victories in the highlands and that a "large offensive" is yet to come.

Despite these preparations, it seems unlikely the North Vietnamese will risk an all-out assault on Bu Prang and Duc Lap. We think they will increase pressure, however, on the South Vietnamese who have taken over defense of the area. The Communists committed considerably greater forces during the siege of Duc Lap last year and still could not take the camp, mainly because of allied air strikes.

Laos: Current Situation



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LAOS

Several battalions of North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao troops yesterday attacked the government support base at Muong Phalane in the southern pan-handle. Preliminary reports indicate that, although the government has been able to hold off the attackers, heavy fighting is continuing on the outskirts of the village. Farther west the enemy had more success as local defenders retreated in the face of an attack on a small government outpost at Ban Taleo.

These attacks are probably intended to ensure the security of the infiltration corridor as the flow of men and supplies to South Vietnam begins to pick up. It is likely that the enemy move was prompted particularly by the temporary government occupation of Muong Phine in early September. That was the deepest government penetration into Communist supply lines in several years.

In the north, Communist forces have recently made several sharp attacks against government outposts around Xieng Khouangville. The heaviest fighting has been concentrated near the airstrip, which has changed hands several times. The Communists have thus far avoided large-unit operations, probably because of supply difficulties and vulnerability to air strikes, but attacks are taking an increasingly heavy toll of the government's already dangerously thin ranks.

The loss of some government positions near Xieng Khouangville does not immediately endanger the government's hold over the Plaine des Jarres, but it does appear to signal the opening round of the enemy's attempt to regain this politically important area.

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ETHIOPIA

Security authorities have quashed an apparent plot to assassinate the Emperor. [redacted] the ringleader was Takele Wolde Hawariat. He is reported to have committed suicide last Sunday, rather than be taken into custody by the police. Investigation of the plot is said to have been touched off by the theft of weapons from army stores in Addis Ababa. Only one other conspirator has been identified, although some army officers may be involved.

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In his seventies, Takele, a former high official of the Supreme Court, was an indefatigable plotter. He had been variously under surveillance and detention for several years. Takele escaped more severe punishment during these years only because the Emperor respected his record as a resistance fighter against the Italians.

The government of course has been sparing in its public commentary on the affair. So far it has announced only that Takele committed suicide after wounding a policeman who was trying to serve him a summons.

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